

VZCZCXRO1773
OO RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHKUK RUEHROV
DE RUEHKU #1562/01 3020958
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 290958Z OCT 07
FM AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0198
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KUWAIT 001562

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

FOR NEA/ARP

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/29/2027

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [KDEM](#) [KU](#) [NATIONAL ASSEMBLY](#)

SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT REMOVES CONTROVERSIAL MINISTERS IN NEW CABINET LINEUP

REF: KUWAIT 882

Classified By: CDA Alan Misenheimer for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) On October 28, the Kuwaiti Government announced the formation of a new 16-person cabinet. The new ministers took the oath of office before the Amir earlier the same day and assumed their new positions immediately. Seven ministers, including FM Shaykh Dr. Mohammad Al Sabah and Prime Minister Shaykh Nasser Mohammad Al-Sabah, were retained with no change in their portfolios. Five ministers from the previous cabinet were retained but have new portfolios. Four individuals not in the previous cabinet were brought in (though one had been a minister previously) while one minister from the previous cabinet was dropped altogether. The one female minister remaining in the cabinet -- the Minister of Education, who was the First Lady's host during her October 24-25 visit to Kuwait -- retained her position, and the number of Shi'a returned to two after one of the Shi'a ministers resigned in August. The Kuwaiti Muslim Brotherhood (KMB) retained the Electricity and Water portfolio after KMB member Mohammad Al-Elaim led a successful energy conservation campaign this past summer. Three ministers have Islamist leanings, four ministers are considered liberals, five ministers are royal family members, three are considered to have tribal allegiances, and roughly six are considered technocrats. (Note: some ministers can be classified in more than one category. End note.)

¶2. (C) This is the fourth cabinet formation since the Amir formally took over leadership of the country in January 2006.

The changes are an attempt on the Amir's part to end the political gridlock in the country resulting from the hostile and dysfunctional state of relations between the Government and the parliament. While some key portfolios for the USG have changed, such as Social Affairs and Labor (key player on TIP) and Finance, we do not foresee any changes in Kuwait foreign policy.

Why Now?

¶3. (C) This major cabinet shuffle comes in the wake of growing threats from opposition MPs to formally question ("grill") several ministers. A series of grillings during the 2006-2007 parliamentary session occupied the legislature and Government's time as important national legislation languished. Prospective grillings have led to rampant rumors of the Amir dissolving Parliament for the second year in a row. The Government has consistently moved to appease, rather than engage, the grillers. The Awqaf (Religious Endowments) and Islamic Affairs Minister faced the most serious grilling threat and was excluded from the cabinet. A formal grilling threat had already been filed against the Finance Minister, who was rotated to the Oil Ministry. (Note: It is unclear how much this will remove him from

parliament's crosshairs. End Note.) The Interior Minister (previously dual-hatted as Defense Minister) faced less serious prospects of grilling, but was stripped of the Interior Ministry portfolio, leaving the Education Minister as the only remaining cabinet member who has been the subject of concrete grilling threats.

¶4. (C) Some observers have commented that the basic cast of characters is the same, and the contentious relationship between the Government and parliament will continue unchanged. Others see the reshuffle as a clear defeat for the Government, which has again proven its inability to stand up to MPs who wish to challenge the Government. The threat to grill Finance Minister Bader Al-Humaidhi, for instance, was frivolous, but the Government chose to rotate him to another ministry rather than stand by him. On the other hand, Government supporters argue that grillings were a distraction, and that the new line-up will allow the parliament to tackle administrative, political and economic reform rather than continuing their political squabbles. If previous experience is a guide, however, the Government is not out of trouble yet. After the last grilling-induced cabinet shake-up in March 2007, lawmakers across the spectrum pledged to focus on legislation rather than grillings. Just six weeks later, however, the Oil Minister made a controversial remark in a newspaper interview and the rest of the parliamentary term was taken up almost entirely by his grilling. It will take uncharacteristically strong leadership on the part of Prime Minister Shaykh Nasser Mohammad Al-Sabah to force MPs to address serious reform issues rather than finding other ways of needling the Government. Shaykh Nasser has not shown strong leadership thus far.

KUWAIT 00001562 002 OF 003

The Cabinet Lineup

¶5. (C)

-- Shaykh Jaber Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense. Shaykh Jaber retains the Defense portfolio but gives up the Interior Ministry. There had been murmurs of grilling him in his capacity of Minister of the Interior.

-- Shaykh Dr. Mohammad Al-Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs. No change.

-- Faisal Mohammad Al-Hajji Bukhudhur, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Cabinet Affairs. No change.

-- Bader Mishari Al-Humaidhi, Minister of Oil. Al-Humaidhi had been the Minister of Finance. Tribal Islamist MP Dhayfallah Buramya had threatened to grill Al-Humaidhi, largely because Al-Humaidhi had led the effort to defeat Buramya's effort to write off all Kuwaitis' personal debts. Buramya may still insist on grilling Al-Humaidhi even though his new portfolio has nothing to do with the debt issue. Al-Humaidhi brings some oil experience to the job. While he was competent at the Finance Ministry he was not especially proactive in promoting reform. Given his past and his relationship with Parliament, he is not likely to be an agent for reform in the Oil Ministry.

-- Shaykh Jaber Al-Khalid Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Minister of Interior. Shaykh Jaber is a first-time minister. A graduate of Sandhurst, he is a former Army Chief of Staff and Ambassador to Saudi Arabia.

-- Jamal Ahmad Al-Shihab, Minister of Social Affairs and Labor and Minister of Justice. Al-Shihab is an accomplished lawyer with a history of government service in the Justice, Social Affairs and Labor, and Planning Ministries. He is considered to be a moderate Islamist.

-- Shaykh Sabah Al-Khalid Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Minister of Information. Shaykh Sabah Al-Khalid was rotated from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor. The Ministry of Information is a traditionally controversial post and the Government may be looking to shore up its stability by assigning a strong royal family member to the position.

-- Abdullah Saud Al-Muhailbi, Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs and Ministry of Communication. The Salafis fiercely attacked the previous Awqaf Minister. Appointing a representative of one of Kuwait's largest tribes may be an effort to make this ministry less susceptible to grilling threats. Al-Muhailbi is a career bureaucrat with no particular professional expertise in either of his portfolios. The government may have been looking for someone who was not a party to the competition between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafis over the Islamic agenda in Kuwait.

-- Abdullah Abdalrahman Al-Taweel, Minister of Health. Al-Taweel, a liberal, was Minister of Commerce from 2003 - ¶2006.

-- Abdulwahid Mahmud Al-Awadhi, Minister of Housing Affairs and Minister of National Assembly Affairs. Al-Awadhi had the Housing portfolio and has been acting National Assembly Affairs Minister since the incumbent resigned in June.

-- Falah Al-Hajiri, Minister of Commerce and Industry. No change.

-- Mohammad Abdullah Al-Elaim, Minister of Electricity and Water. No change. Al-Elaim is the only minister from the Muslim Brotherhood.

-- Mustafa Jassim Al-Shimmali, Minister of Finance. First-time minister and former U/S of Finance. Shi'a.

-- Moussa Hussein Al-Sarraf, Minister of Public Works and Minister of State for Municipality Affairs. No change. Shi'a.

-- Nouriya Al-Sabih, Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education. No change. A liberal, she remains the only female cabinet member.

For more reporting from Embassy Kuwait, visit:
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/kuwait/?cable> s

Visit Kuwait's Classified Website:

KUWAIT 00001562 003 OF 003

<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/kuwait/>

MISENHEIMER